

Champion VA

Champion Victoria Athletic Football Club is a professional football club based in Victoria, Concordia, Pharos. The team competes in PSL A, the top tier of the Pharonian football. Champion is the only of the 'big teams' in Pharos that has never won the National Championship or the PSC Cup.

History

Origins and Formation

Between 1852 and 1854, the exhibition building known as The Victoria International Exhibition Center was relocated from the Old Town to Prins Street and the New Town and rebuilt in an area next to Prins Street Gardens. This area was renamed Union Palace – including the Union Palace Park surrounding the site where various sports facilities were built. The Union Palace Company who owned the exhibition building founded the Union Palace Club in 1857 to play Pharonian football (a game played in Pharos with sticks and feet), before turning their attention to football (soccer). It had been lobbied by existing members of the club to provide a continuation of sporting activities during the winter months. The company formed an amateur Union Palace football club in 1861. Many of its original



The Union Palace, 1880s

Concordian Football Association Championships were declared. With the Union Palace Company also reliant on tourist activity for their income, they sought fresh attractions for the venue, and founded the Victoria Athletic Club, before its chairman Willard Gil Grange decided to form a new

players were members of the Pharonian football club, and they shared the same pitch within the Union Palace Park.

The amateur club became one of the original founder members of the Southern Football Association in 1887. They competed in the first ever competition in 1887–88, finishing in 4th position and also played in the next four seasons of the short-lived Southern League, before disappearing from historical records. In 1891, the



Union Palace Stadium 1900's

professional football club to play at the Union stadium, which was the largest in Concordia at the time.

Willard Gil Grange (18 July 1858 – 23 October 1925) was an amateur Pharonian footballer who was important in the development of the sport and is widely considered one of its greatest players. He was nominally amateur as a sportsman in various sports, but he is said to have made more money from his sporting activities than any professional. He was an extremely competitive player and, although he was one of the most famous men in Concordia at the time, he was also one of the most controversial on account of his gamesmanship and moneymaking.



Willard Gil Grange

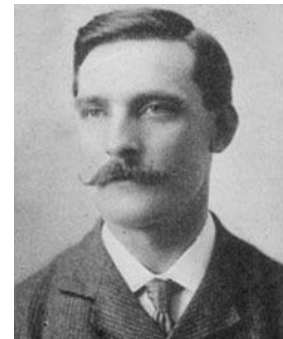


Edi Goodman

The professional Champion Athletics Football Club was formed on 10 September 1905 under the chairmanship of W.G. Grange, and were assisted by Edi Goodman, an Old Victorians employee who was recommended to Grange by the Old Victorians chairman, Alvin Gren. Goodman organised the business side of the club and appointed Jan Roson to be the team's manager. Roson had transformed his previous club, The Gyl Rangers, from an amateur outfit to an established Football League First Division team. Goodman, a former player with Old Victorians, had his playing career cut short by an injury which led to the amputation of his right leg. He also managed Champion Athletics from 1907 to 1925, becoming the club's longest ever serving manager in the process.

Early years and the 1st Championship

In their first professional season in 1905-06, Champion Athletics were put in Concordia's Second Division. The team's manager Jan Roson established a squad of sixteen professionals, most of them signed from clubs from Northern Concordia, where Roson came from. Their opening fixture was at home against Old Victorians Reserves, and approximately 3,000 spectators paid 6d



Jan Roson



Champion Athletics 1906 with Jan Roson far left and Edi Goodman second from the right, standing

to stand or a shilling to be seated. Champion led 3-0 after 30 minutes, before fading and losing 3-4. However, that was the club's only defeat in the league all season, and Champion Athletics were crowned champions and gained promotion to the First Division. Following their promotion, Champions Athletics finished ninth in the Concordian First Division and reached

the Concordian Cup final, losing in front of 35,000 spectators at Union Palace Stadium to Victoria City 1-0.

Jan Roson left Champion to manage W.G. Grange's new club, The Grange Eagles FC for the 1907–08 season, and Edi Goodman took over as manager and club secretary. Champion Athletics finished in the upper part of the First Division table until the outbreak of The Great War, with a fourth position in 2008-09 being their best season.

The Palace stadium was almost destroyed in an attempted terrorist bombing of the 1913 Concordian Cup final, when the suffragettes of the Women's Social and Political Union, plotted to blow up the stands. This was part of the suffragette bombing and arson campaign, in which the suffragettes carried out a series of politically motivated bombing and arson attacks nationwide, as part of their campaign for women's suffrage.



A splendid snapshot of Daryl Liesen's goal vs Select that gave Champion the 1923 Concordia title

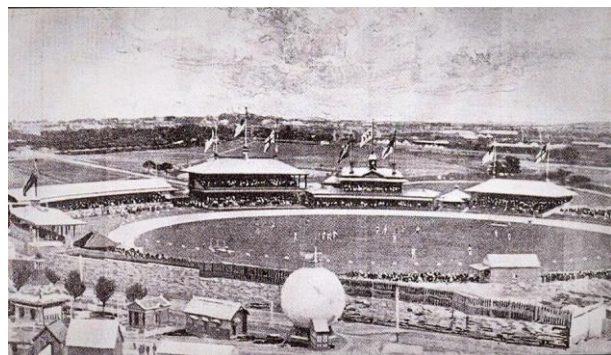
With Select dominating the Concordian football scene, it was not possible for Champion Athletics or any other Concordian club to participate in the National Championship, established in 1916. Champion Athletics' first breakthrough was made in 1923, when they won their first ever Concordian Championship, after beating Select 1-0

in the final day of play in Union Palace Stadium, by a header of Daryl Liesen. They finished in 5th position in the following National Championship.

A new stadium and the years of glory

In 1924, the club made a significant purchase with regards to a new permanent home, as Union Palace Stadium was used by Champion Athletics and 4 other teams in the city. Back in 1919, the Champion Athletics Board's minute book contained an entry instructing the Secretary to investigate the possibility of obtaining a lease on the 'ground at Gorgie', although calling it a 'ground' was a little misleading since at the time it was a piece of wasteland valuable only to the Concordia Coast Railway Company. At one time it had been a brickfield, and two chimney stacks still remained.

On 3 January 1924, the club purchased the ground at a cost of £2,750, and renowned football stadium architect Arto Leit was commissioned to design the new venue, incorporating a track and field track as well. Oval Grounds, as it was named after its shape, were inaugurated on 30 August 1924 by the Mayor of Victoria and it boasted many



Champion Athletics new venue, Oval Grounds, 1924

luxuries, including "offices, tea rooms, training quarters, plunge, slipper, shower and needle baths".

Edi Goodman stepped down as manager three months into the 1925–26 season after 18 years at the helm to return to administrative duties, and a succession of managers attempted to plot Champion's climb back up

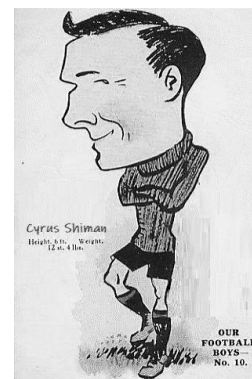


The new Victory Stand in 1970's with floodlights



Fran Mavin

the Concordian Football League pyramid. Under Fran Mavin, Champion Athletics were crowned Concordia's champions for 3 seasons in a row, from 1929 to 1931 and again another 3 times in 1934, 1935 and 1937, featuring players like goalkeeper Cyrus Shiman, who in 2005 was voted as 2nd best all-time club keeper, inside



Champion goalkeeper Cyrus Shiman, caricatured in the Football Special (1932)



Cyrus Shiman



Deril Bosniak



Thad Juris



Jole Harz

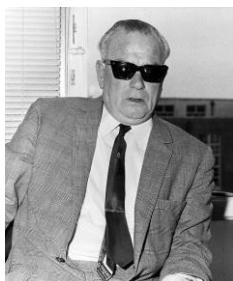
forward Deril Bosniak, center back Thad Juris and striker Jole Harz. the National level,

They did not however enjoy the same success in with a 3rd place in the 1929 National Championship their best performance.

The war years of 1939–45 saw football enter a period of disarray with many players serving in the armed forces or even going abroad to actual fight. Football continued in the island and Champion Athletics won 2 more Concordian titles, in 1942 and 1944.

Post war years

After the War, Champion Athletics endured a period of mediocracy, finishing in mid-table of the Concordian Football League, with the exception of the 1951-52 season, when they won their 10th championship under new manager Lathan Laur.



Arno Vait

The 1958–59 season began a period of change with Arno Vait taking control of the club as chairman. Vait, a local builder businessman, reconstructed the stadium to a football-specific one, increasing



Lathan Laur

capacity to 40,000, by eliminating the track part of the pitch. In 1960 Champion Athletics set a record in Concordia for the highest average attendance of 29,092, and the highest attendance at an individual match; 37,774 for the Good Friday game at Oval Park against Dynamo Victoria.

The 1961–62 season saw Champion achieve distinction, when they played the great Real Madrid team of that era in an historic friendly match. This was the first time that the Spanish giants had ever played a match in Pharos and was only two weeks before they were due to play Benfica in the European Cup final. A full-strength Madrid team beat Champion 4–3.



Bert Haed

Although Laur resigned for health reasons towards the end of 1962, the new administration and the reconstructed stadium proved a turning point in the club's history. Din Graam and then Bert Haed guided Champion Athletics to 2 more Concordian Championships in 1966 and 1970, though once again they did not have success at the National level, except for the nomination of goalkeeper Eugen Press as best League's keeper.

Champion Athletics will win 2 more Concordian Championships, in 1977 and in 1980, under Haed and were selected, alongside Select and Cardenas SFC, as Concordia's representatives for the newly formed PSL A division in 1981. In 1980 the team came close to win a national title, but finished in 2nd place, just one point behind champions Hilvar Athletics.



Eugen Press

The PSL era



Linge Jannov

Bert Haed quit in the summer of 1981 and Marcel Motar, the 35-year-old ex-Dynamo Victoria player was hired. Champion Athletics finished in 14th place, avoiding relegation by 2 points, with Linge Jannov, the experienced defender being its top scorer with 7 goals, 6 of them from penalties.

From the young and inexperienced Motar, Vait selected 72-year-old Don Tobilio to replace him as manager. Tobilio had no experience at all

from top league teams, having managed only in Concordia's lower divisions. Tobilio introduced some hopeful youngsters from the youth team that won the youth cup of 1981, like Fenel Manlin, Brooks Palmer, Tim Halberg, Centrik Culver and Fenel Knapp, with the press naming Champion Athletics "*Team of the Eighties*". The team finished in 12th position, but unfortunately the young starlets were sold to bigger teams over the next seasons and the team could not keep this form up. The club were also suffering financial problems when another change occurred. Property developer Ron Noad, previously the chairman of Dynamo Victoria, led a consortium to take financial control of the club, purchasing it from Arno Vait.



Tim Halberg



Ron Noad

Champion Athletics spent the next couple of seasons flirting with relegation and there were numerous managerial changes, including the unpopular appointment of ex-Cardenas manager Salvor Penda.

When PSL changed its format in 1988 to a closed 24-team regular season with play-offs, Champion Athletics were amongst those teams. Sus Weshel, who had worked with Alma Sport, was named manager and led the team in the first 3 seasons of the new format, making each time the play-offs first round. In 1991 and 1992,

Champion finished last of their regular season group, changing 4 managers in 2 years.

In the summer of 1992, former Dalton SC and Chelsea international footballer Jan Lefkin was appointed as Champion Athletics' manager. Lefkin, who had only worked one season with Centralia Trandor, worked on rebuilding the club, signing players like Noth Hamer, Ador De Boer, Mik Lenzi and Ankor Kaap. Lefkin stabilized the club and led them to the play-offs again, finishing in 8th place in 1995 and in 5th place in 1996 and 1997.



Jan Lefkin

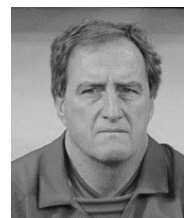
In the summer of 1995 Champion Athletics and Victoria City FC



agreed on a merger, with Champion taking over City's professional team. The club was renamed Champion Victoria Athletic FC, or simply Champion VA. The merger did not please Victoria City fans, who 2 years later formed a new Victoria City professional side.

Manager Jan Lefkin left in 1997 to join Dalton SC and Marcel Motar was promoted from youth manager to the first team. Under Motar Champion Athletics

established themselves as a major force in the PSL, finishing in 2nd position in 2000, gaining a European spot in the Champions League of 2000-01. They had a remarkable season in Europe, eliminating Sturm Graz and Feyenoord in the preliminaries, entering the group stage 1, playing against Monaco, Glasgow Rangers and Galatasaray, winning all 3 games in Victoria. Then they entered the 2nd group round, finishing 3rd in a group with Manchester Utd, Valencia and Panathinaikos.



Marcel Motar

Two administrations and changes in ownership

Noad eventually sold the club to Mark Goldberg on 5 June 1998, becoming the second-longest serving Champion chairman. Goldberg's tenure of the club was not a success and Champion VA entered administration in March 1999. Although the fans established a group called the Champion Supporters' Trust in a bid to gain control of the club, millionaire and lifelong fan Sim Jordan negotiated a deal with creditors and the administrator, and a new company, CVAFC 2000 took control. Jordan sold Oval Park's leasehold to Union Insurance, in order for necessary innovations that finished in 2006. The Stadium was renamed Union Stadion.



Union Stadion 2006

Champion VA slipped back to mediocrity after Motar left in 2001 to coach in Britain. After Levi Jorden, who was in charge in 2001-02, Fenel Ercling was appointed manager. During Ercling's tenure, Champion VA had its ups and downs, but in 2006 they finished in 16th place and were relegated for the first time in the second division.

Orum Osman who took over from Ercling led the team to first division right away and finished in 9th position in 2009. However, he was forced to leave as the club entered administration for a second time and it was not until June 2012 that a takeover was complete, after the team was relegated for a second time.

End of financial crisis (2012-present)



Champion fans protest outside the Sood Bank HQ in Victoria on 1 June 2012.

CVAFC 2012, a consortium of four wealthy fans, Stanel Paris, Marlon Long, Stanel Brovelt and Jelmer Hoskin was established, with each owning 25% share of the company. The four successfully negotiated a



Stanel Paris

takeover with the administrator Bren Guil and a company voluntary arrangement was formally accepted by company creditors on 20 August 2012. The consortium also purchased back Union Arena from

Sood Bank after a demonstration by fans put pressure on the bank to agree terms.

With Arno Neuman as new manager, Champion VA finished top of the second division, 14 points clear of 2nd place Olympic Eptapolis and returned again in the top tier. Neuman stayed 3 years and left to manage Alma Sport, with Fenel Ercling coming for a 2nd spell in 2015. The team finished 10th, but during the next season battled for survival. Ercling was fired in March 2017 and the team was relegated once more.

In December 2015, investors Jos Harrin and Dan Blitzer each bought an 18% stake in the club as general partners for a total of ff 50 million, although the stake is now estimated to be 10%.

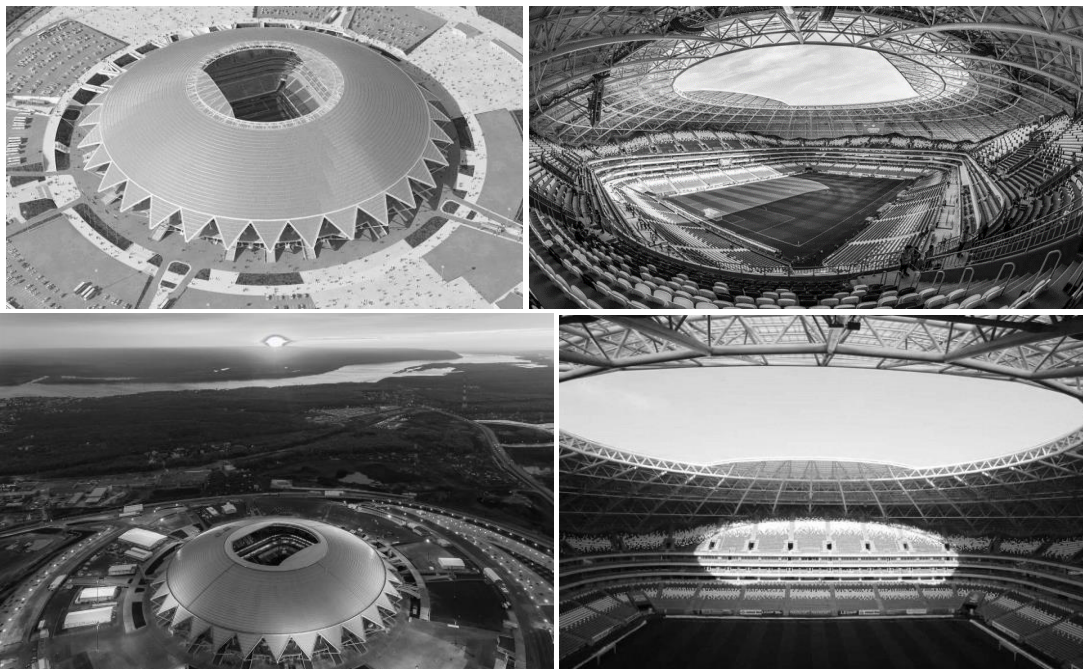


Fenel Manlin

The team returned to the first division in 2018 under new manager Bale von Arx, who was fired midway next season replaced by former Champion Athletics player and National Team manager Fenel Manlin.

A new stadium

The new owners agreed to sell Union Arena to the City in exchange for land to build a new stadium. Initial bid for this stadium was supposed to sit on a remote Island south of Victoria's historical centre. Then a new location near the airport was contemplated, but eventually a clear site near the northern highway towards Deltalene was selected. It facilitated foundation works and allowed to rationalize the budget. Preparatory works on site were launched in early 2017 and it was delivered in September 2021. Created by international team of architects and engineers, this stadium outgrows many other venues in terms of scale. Its dome should span across 330 meters and the futuristic spheroid-shaped roof earned it the name Cosmos Arena. The vast roof will allow creation of over 150,000 square meters of floor space. The double-tiered stands should hold 45,000 people and provide extensive corporate structures throughout two continuous rings of premium seating.



Cosmos Arena

Manlin led the team in 5th place in 2022 and in European competitions for the second time, although with no similar success this time (they were eliminated in the preliminary round of the Conference League by AIK Solna).

In August 2021, an American investor John Textor bought a 40% stake worth ff 87.5 million, increasing to 45% in 2023. Paris remained chairman with ownership around 10% equity. Concordian retail businessman Ron Franco and other investors own the remaining 9%.

Manlin went to AG Nobel in 2023, with Fenel Albin taking over. He was replaced in the summer of 2024 by Bred McLean.